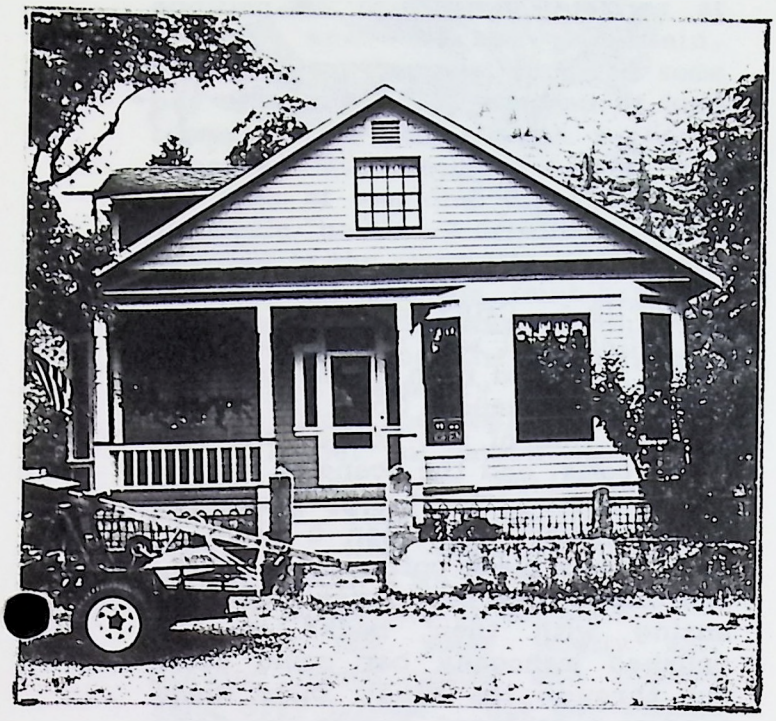
Nuggets of News

GOLD HILL HISTORICAL SOCIETY
gold discovered 1857
recording the past-for the future
1986

P.O. Box 26
Gold Hill, Ore. 97525

504 First Avenue
(503) 855-1182

June, 1994



MUSEUM PROGRESS

At last!! Central heat and air conditioning have been installed and we are now affording absolute comfort for visitors and our volunteers who staff the museum. This is also a great improvement for our artifacts with more constant temperatures and the elimination of winter dampness.

Our beautiful new home is now all dressed up in a delightful exterior coat of paint, and we are the showplace of Gold Hill! Please be sure to visit and look us over if you haven't done so yet. We were fortunate to be able to have insulation blown into the walls before the painting was done, and will do the attic ourselves at a later date. At least they won't have to drill holes and patch after the new paint.

Work on the darkroom is also progressing nicely. Only minor wiring, exhaust fans and finishing touches remain. It will be good to have it finished and be able to develop our own prints again.

Getting our signs done has been a problem, but it can now be placed in the "solved" column. Ted Wharton and Gary Martin had a learning experience with the router and other equipment in Rex Parker's shop and have done a magnificent job on them. One is in front of the Police Station on 2nd Ave. directing people 1 block to the museum. There are also signs at each end of town on 2nd Ave and one on Hwy. 234, giving the address. With improved signage, we should see our visitation improve.

An Archeology Dig was held on June 3rd by one of the professors from SOSC and some of the Patrick School students. We haven't heard whether they found anything, but it sounds like a good time was had by all - so much so that they want to do it again!

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EARLY MEMORIES IN GOLD HILL

by Charles Benjamin Wharton
December 1993

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chuck Wharton is a Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering and Plasma Physics at Cornell University, Ithaca, N. Y. His wife, Gloria, from Santa Fe, N.M., is a real estate broker in Ithaca. They have

lived in California and in several countries in Europe and Asia, and maintain many friendships around the world. Their three children, Carl, Kristi and Mark are all married, and scattered around the country. They dote on two granddaughters.

Chuck, who was known as Ben through his teen years, was born in Gold Hill in 1926, but moved with the family at the end of his third grade year to Medford, where he completed up to 3-1/2 years of high school before enlisting in the Navy. After the War the school officials were not inclined to readmit a 20-year old veteran, and made a strong enough case to get him admitted to the University of California in Berkeley, where he finished both his undergraduate and graduate work. His professional career has been in engineering and physics research and teaching.

Additional biographical details can be found in Who's Who in America.

FORWARD

Gold Hill, Oregon, born of necessity in the 1870's to exploit the precious yellow metal, has followed the course of a typical frontier boom town, but with a difference; it took the road toward a renaissance town rather than a ghost town. In spite of the disadvantage of being on the wrong side of the Rogue River from the Old Stage Road, it survived, while Dardanelles, which was ideally situated, now is only a memory, marked by a stone at the location of the first post office in Southern Oregon. You may call it fate, but probably it has more to do with a cement plant and a railroad. In any case, this little town, which has slept peacefully for many years, is stirring, becoming aware of its heritage, and claiming its place in the history of the West.

The episodes related here are from my own recollections, corroborated by brother, Ted, who made some corrections and added some details. Since Ted is six years older, his slightly different viewpoints were valuable in adding perspective. Some material originated from interviews with Marjory Pena Sax, of Medford, Oregon, and with Aunt Ruth Harmon, of Grants Pass, Oregon. Some episodes concerning our Father and Mother are included to provide a background setting.

CHAPTER 1. CURFEW

Gold Hill was a quiet town in 1928. The gold rush days were long gone. The gaudy Gold Hill Hotel, old-time hub of the action, the red light rooms, and the scene of many a brawl during the bawdy times 50 years earlier, was then a place to linger over black coffee or a Pabst, and discuss the hard times. Patrons sitting with their backs to the polished mahogany bar could make out through the dingy plate glass window a billboard across the Sams Valley Road touting "Old Golds---Not a Cough in a Carload!" An occasional pocket hunter, with his pick and shovel and tired donkey struck pay dirt, and dredging rigs still scoured the gravel bars in Rogue River and Sardine Creek. Brother Ted and I even caught the gold fever later, and had a mine, which we'll discuss when the time comes. But the "gold" in Gold Hill was mostly an empty name. And a word on the cigarette billboard.

The ample jail house was seldom used. An occasional hobo, jumping from a Southern Pacific freight car as the train slowed to pick off a mail pouch, was apprehended pilfering a chicken or a few ears of corn from a back yard garden. He was assured of a free jail-house dinner if he got caught, or a hobo stew under the bridge down by the river if he didn't. Either way the stop was worth while, and the word was

passed up and down the line that Gold Hill was a better stop than Grants Pass or Medford. That was before a tough mayor and constable started sending the jail birds to Rock Point to break up limestone boulders for the Beaver Portland Cement Plant. The quarry was operated by the State as a work camp for trusty prisoners who had been sentenced to hard labor. This small quarry was in addition to the large quarries at Zacher and Marble Mountain. Prisoners worked and received some pay from the plant, instead of long terms rotting in cells at taxpayer expense. But the hoboes didn't like the idea of working off their time alongside "hardened criminals". And the ride to the work site in the tram car was not for the faint-hearted. The remains of the stone landing can still be seen across the highway from Rock Point Cemetery early in the spring, before the weeds grow up.

Another jail patron was an old Swede named Sven Peterson (Dad called him "Swan" when he told us about it), who went on drinking binges once in a while, and spent the night in jail drying up the DT's.

But the jailer mostly sat, brewing boiled coffee and reading Zane Grey novels. His two official jobs were the raising and lowering of the flag, and ringing the curfew bell at dusk to warn kids to get home and not be wandering around town. He also was obliged to pass the time of day with the Mayor when things were extra slow.

The curfew bell fascinated me for some reason, and I had several mental pictures of what it must look like. I knew the two little hemispheres on top of the alarm clock were bells, and Mrs. Robbins used a hand bell to call the orchard workers in for mid-day dinner at the del Rio. They were high-pitched. Oh, yes, there was the Methodist Church bell that my Grandfather, the Reverend Charles E. Wharton rang every Sunday. It was deeper, but made a small, not very pleasant sound. But the curfew bell was deep-throated, resonant, authoritative, and the jailer always rang it slowly, for a long time, to show the town his authority over its actions.

One summer afternoon I decided that I had to go satisfy my curiosity, and see the bell-ringing in action. I was sure it was not very far away, because it sounded loud and clear at our house up on the hill. And my feet were already pretty tough from going barefoot since May. I knew the way to the Dungey's house at the bottom of the hill, and had walked with my mother to Toad Turner's house for Ladies Aid quilting bees. Beyond that was new territory.

I slipped away while Mother was back at the rabbit house scooping out rolled barley for the 50 rabbits. My father was working in Medford, where he had to go to find work after he sold the Gold Hill News the year before. Short 2-1/2 year-old legs take a long time to go anywhere, but I was through the scrub pines and madrone grove before I was missed.

A natural assumption when a child is suddenly missing on a warm, quiet afternoon is that he either fell asleep somewhere, or is playing is some out-of-the-way spot. There were few hazards; we didn't have a well to fall down, and all the windows had screens to prevent falling out. Mother and brother Ted began a systematic search, calling "Benny!", "Benny!" at appropriate intervals*.
It wasn't until they got to the Dungey's that they learned from Laura that a small figure had just trudged by, headed east, and then they spotted that same small figure thrashing through the tall weeds going in the direction of the Town Hall.
I remember vividly seeing my goal, and hurrying as fast as I could to get there before they caught up. But there was still a long block to go. After a few sound swats were administered, the party of three returned slowly back up the hill and into the house.

*[I was known as Benny or Ben up until the time I joined the Navy in 1944; the Navy didn't recognize middle names, and insisted that I was Charles from that time on.]

A new form of punishment was then initiated: I was seated up on the fireplace mantle, and there I sat until supper time, scared to move. But just to prevent future escapades, the next day we walked to the jail house to see the curfew. The jail house was a small, drab brick building, with tiny, barred windows, partly in the shade of a big maple tree that was shedding helicopter seed pods onto a small cannon. The flag was properly hoisted, but there was no jailer, nor anyone else around, and there was no bell to be seen. Finally Ted pointed to a length of railroad track hanging on two chains, and when he banged it with a rock, sure enough, it made that magical sound.

That evening, in the bedroom shared with Ted, we heard the familiar sound as always, but now the mystery was gone. I no longer yearned to explore the town, but there wasn't much opportunity anyway, because Cousin Alice, or sometimes Aunt Ruth, both of whom I loved dearly, came to babysit while Mother and Auntie worked at the del Rio Orchards. (Aunt Evagene lived with us for several years, until she married Uncle Ivan Smith). Occasionally they left me with Mrs. Paul, whom I hated with a passion, for reasons that I no longer remember. Ted was old enough not to require a daytime babysitter, but not quite old enough to be one.

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CHAPTER 2. WINTER OF '30-'31

Winter in Southern Oregon is a mixed bag. The rains of November can be counted on to break the long summer drought, to the delight of some and the dread of others. Farmers and orchard people who have completed harvest are mostly happy to see the moisture permeating the ground and filling reservoirs. Less happy are folks venturing out on the roads who find themselves enveloped in valley fog so dense it obscures all objects beyond the end of the driveway, for weeks on end. The fog soaks everything, even objects protected from the rain by a roof above. Valley dwellers are not cheered to learn from fellow citizen up toward the Cascades that it has been sunny and warm all week in Prospect and Butte Falls.

Thanksgiving week occurs at the peak of this dreary season, and valley residents can be expected to celebrate with extra vigor, and longer, than folks in the upland regions, in order to buoy up their spirits. Then the tables get turned, and as the fog thins out below, the uphill folks begin getting sleet and wet snow. Once in a while there is a white Christmas as low as the 2500-foot elevation. By January the fog is gone, and the rest of the winter is nice.

In 1930 there was a white Christmas clear down in the valley, and in fact, residents of Gold Hill, right beside the Rogue River, and subject to valley weather almost to match Medford's, reckoned they couldn't remember a snowier winter. While the usual winter storms bring only an occasional inch or two, that year the snow piled up behind our house almost to the eaves, and patches remained until April. It was wet snow, not your dry Montana Stuff, and when the weather turned cold, the top crust froze solid. This was in the midst of the Great Depression, when people could least afford to heat their houses, but fortunately we had cut plenty of wood to burn in the fireplace and kitchen stove, and Mother had her broken finger to show for it, a casualty from rolling chunks down the mountain. Unfortunately, that was the winter when the heatilator that Dad had built into the wall when he remodeled the house started smoking. Apparently the steel plate in the back of the fireplace developed a crack along one edge, and smoke came out of the vents in the dining room and upstairs. So the vents had to be sealed, and the family wore long underwear, even in the house. Hot water bottles and flannel sheets made going to bed a little less of a shock in the cold bedroom.

We had milk delivered to our front gate twice a week. I don't know why milk men have to come before dawn, but on frosty morning, after the bottles had sat there for three

hours, the cream at the top had frozen, and the caps were lifted up and sat atop an inch column of white frost. This fragile structure had to be handled with care, while transporting the bottles through the garden, up the steps, across the terrace and into the kitchen. When Aunt Evagene (Auntie) got the milk she took a knife and pan with her, and cut off the frost column, making the transport much less tricky. Auntie lived with us for several years before she married Uncle Ivan Smith.Most residents were not prepared for such extreme weather. Mountain passes were closed, and even the Southern Pacific trains wore snow plows up front. Our family's shoes were always filled with snow, and the fireplace screen was continually draped with wet socks. When Ted came home from school, his lower half looking like a melting snowman, his progress to the fireplace could be traced by clumps of white across the kitchen floor. Naturally, Mother wasn't happy with the wet trail, and reminded him where the mop was kept. It was not until the next winter that we were able to afford buckle-up galoshes.

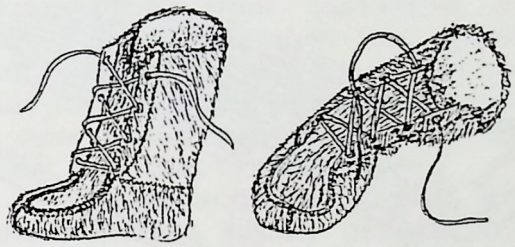
My clothing was a considerable problem. Imagine trying to keep an active 4-going-on-5 year old dry when there is such rare and glorious stuff outside to play in. I think we went through the entire wardrobe of clothes in my size, and were rolling up, tucking in and tying together Ted's hand-me-downs, when Mother had a stroke of genius.

Eskimos and Alaskan trappers wear skins and furs, why not Benny? We raised rabbits (actually they were hares, but we called them rabbits), for food, for barter or sale to neighbors and E. T. Ham's Market, and for furs to sell to a dealer in Medford. Why not make some fur leggings, or maybe even a whole suit?

I remember well the stuck fingers from attempts to help with the sewing. Auntie cut the skins and massaged them trying to remove some of the stiffness. We wondered how furriers got the store-bought furs to be so soft, while ours were crinkley and stiff. Ted's school book said that Indian squaws chewed deerhide to soften the buckskin, but Auntie wasn't enthused.

A big decision had to be made; should the fur be on the outside, with the seams and rough skin inside, or the soft fur on the inside, with the ugly skin outside? The final decision was to put the fur outside, because it would shed the snow better. My pants would protect my legs.

The first model was wonderful, and kept my calves warm and dry. But they rode up, leaving a freezing gap at the shoe-tops that still let in snow. We considered a strap under the instep, but Dad, who had returned from Medford for a while to work with Warren Coppoc on a painting job, decided to make attached moccasins. Ted helped with the softening, which he called "tanning", a word coming also out of his school book.

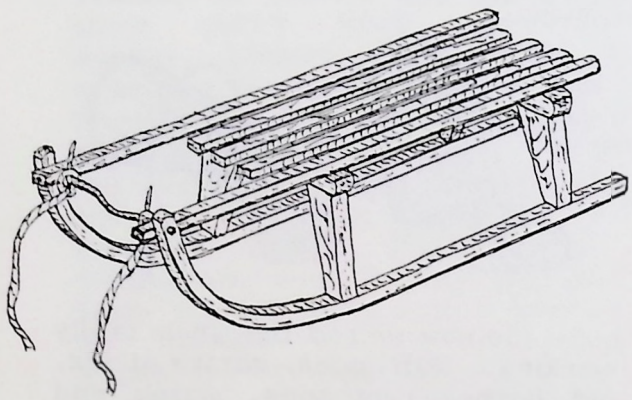


So now we had the whole family working. Stiff hides, scraps of fur, old leather boot tops, string and chunks of bees wax, which helped to waterproof the string, were spread around the living room and on the dining room table. Five people were fully engaged in a project about which we had only a rudimentary idea, and whose goal was just to keep my feet dry. I mostly watched, because all the jobs were taken up, and anyway, I was just a kid.

The finished Rabbit Boots actually were quite handsome, but stiff as boards. I remember well the struggle to get them on and off. Dad promised they would soften with use, and they did a little bit. Ted learned from Uncle Jess Starns, who was a great outdoorsman, that leather can be softened with mink oil, and we thought about old man Cook's minks.

Alvie Cook had a mink house across the street in front of our garden, but we weren't on very good terms with him, as you will see in a later chapter. So there wasn't a very good chance that we would be able to lay our hands on any mink oil. Uncle Jess said that skunk oil would work about as well, and he happened to have some, which he brought next time he passed through on his motorcycle. We smeared the insides with skunk oil, but then Mother didn't allow the boots in the house any longer.

Now playing in the snow was a pleasure, and the sledding runs that used to fill my pants legs with snow could be repeated over and over. Dad made the runs even higher by stacking up a pile of old chimney tiles on the shady side of the house, and Ted climbed up on the roof and pushed off snow on top of them.



The rest of the fur suit never got made, partly because the leggings solved most of the problem, but also because Mother realized how many skins would be required, and how much money we could get by selling them instead. And besides, everyone was tired of cleaning up the hairy mess each time a hide was cut up.

By the end of winter one of the leggings had cracked open. Ted noticed it first, and reported that the right legging had a split in it. I hadn't been keeping track of which one went on which leg, but from then on, it always went on the right leg until the snow and slush were gone. I wanted him to be right. He was my big brother.

CHAPTER 3. DUST and STEEL BALLS

The Beaver Portland Cement Plant meant many things to many people. Sporadic employment for 40 to 100 men, right through the depression years was a definite plus. The high quality cement was shipped as far as Alaska, for demanding cold-weather applications. It made rich men of the Martins and the Blairs, who built fine houses. The Blairs had a swimming pool and a Japanese garden, with big red goldfish. And of Moose Muirhead, who drove big sports cars, sometimes in races. But enduring the coating of dust emanating from the tall stack that covered every car, house, tree and the insides of workers' lungs, including Uncle Ivan's, was a steep price to pay. Even the leathery green madrone leaves were rendered so brittle that they cracked and made a bitter taste when they were folded into little cups for dipping water out of the Duel Gulch spring. Ted was known as "Dusty" long after we moved to Medford, because of Gold Hill's reputation for dust.

The source of the dust was the grinding mill that pulverized the fired clinkers into powdered cement. The grinder used steel billets the size of small cannon balls which eventually got eroded down into little bean-shaped pellets 3/4 to 2 inches long after a year or so. These rejects were collected in a hopper for sale to the junk man. But they were also coveted by neighborhood kids who knew about them as perfect slingshot ammo. The chain link fence was hardly a challenge for 7 to 12 year olds. I was only 5, so my job was as sentry to watch out for Frenchy Munier, while Ted and the Dungey boys filled their pockets. Buddy Blair, whose father was a big shot at the plant, didn't like the idea, but he never squealed on us. He hid out around the corner, because Frenchy was his uncle, and he knew he would get licked with the razor strap if his father found out he was stealing from the plant. I had seen him get strapped for far less an infraction.

to be continued.....

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SCHOOL REUNION

The annual Gold Hill school reunion will be held June 25th and 26th this year, with registration Saturday, the 25th starting at 1:00 PM at the Gold Hill Grange. I'm sure we'll see lots of visitors to the museum these two days.

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GOLD DUST DAY

This year Gold Dust Day was June 4th. Weather-wise, the sky was just as threatening as last year, but no rain was felt. GHHS opted not to have an entry in the parade since we were spread too thin with museum operations and manning our booth. Again this year, we sold helium balloons and did face painting, and the drawing was held for our beautiful "Kelly" doll. She was won by Joyce Trask of Medford.

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MORE NEWS FROM ENGLAND

11 May, 1994

Greetings from England --

I know that summer is nearly here. The trees and shrubs have leafed out, the pastures are greener, the tourists are more numerous, and the rain is warmer. Actually, we've had a few sunny days in the last several weeks. I'll never take sunshine for granted again.

While you only have a month left, English schools continue until July 22. However, we have a half-term break at the end of May. We will ferry to Ireland.

In April we spent two weeks in France. We ferried across the English Channel in a severe storm. My famous last words before we drove on to the ferry were, "No, I don't want any of those pills. I never get seasick." That trip gave me respect for the power of the sea.

First we visited the Normandy region, where literally hundreds of thousands of allied troops landed to liberate France. We drove to Utah Beach, Omaha Beach, and a cemetery of American soldiers killed in the endeavor. The cemetery was more a memorial to those who gave their lives to free others than a burial ground. our entire family was quite moved by this visit. I know that I walked a little taller as I left the exit.

France truly is a fashion-conscious country. It seems that everyone is well-dressed and well-groomed. It is also extremely expensive. You may have heard that tourists in France eat a lot of bread and wine. Its true, because they are cheap. Excellent red wine can be as low as $1.50 per bottle. Bread is always fresh and cheap. Bakeries are everywhere.

We stayed in Paris for five days. It is a clean, vibrant city with excellent public transportation. All of the attractions which are world famous, such as Notre Dame, Eiffel Towel, and Arc de Triomphe, are magnificent. What impressed me about France was that the people were friendly toward us. We had heard that English-speaking people get some rather rude treatment. We did not find that to be the case.

England and France are now connected by a tunnel beneath the English Channel. Drive your car onto a train car in London. Three and a half hours later you'll be in Paris. This engineering feat was first planned in the middle 1800's. Now it has become a reality.

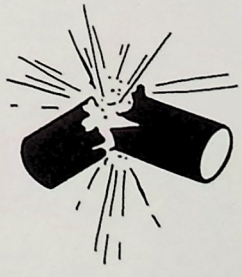
I hope you all have splendid summer vacations. Beware, because when I return I may capture you for a slide show on English education or maybe just England. I encourage you to seek a teacher exchange. It is a wonderful life experience. Should you be selected for England, you'll be in for a real treat.

Cheers --

Tom Cushman

Alice, David, Kenny, Rachel, Daniel

(Ed. Note: Tom Cushman is a charter member and past president of Gold Hill Historical Society.)



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OFFICERS

President - Marge Martin
855-1559
Vice-President - Clare Moore
855-1891
Secretary - Ted Wharton
773-4525
Treasurer - Lyn Parker
855-9059

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Have a wonderful summer and HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY, 4th of July!! Also, have a safe and happy Labor Day.

Gold Hill Historical Society
504 First Avenue
Post Office Box 26
Gold Hill, Oregon 97525

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MONTHLY MEETINGS

Regular montly meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 P.M. in the museum, located at 504 First Avenue. Our telephone number is (503) 855-1182. The Annual Board Meeting is held in August in place of a regular meeting and usually takes the form of potluck, held on the museum grounds, on a Sunday. Definite date and time will be posted in the museum. Please join us for our regular meetings and the potluck:

Wednesday, June 15th, 7:00 PM
Wednesday, July 20th, 7:00 PM
August - to be announced
Wednesday, Sep. 21st, 7:00 PM